

President Lula Asked to Leave Brazil After He Pans National Soccer Team

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The coach of Brazil's soccer national team, Dunga, and some Brazil players were not happy to hear Brazilian President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, praise Argentine star Lionel Messi and complain about the Brazilian seleção. They called for support and one of them suggested the president should become an Argentine citizen.

In comments published this Thursday, September 4, by the Brazilian press, Lula said that the Brazilian players were not trying hard enough on the field and called Argentina forward Messi the best player in the world.

"I'm very sad to hear that from him," commented Brazil goalkeeper Júlio César. "Especially when he talked about Messi, that he goes after lost balls while we just cross our arms; he should go live in Argentina then, become an Argentine citizen and resign from the presidency. Maybe things would improve in Brazil."

Júlio César said the national team is going through a difficult time and needs to be supported, not criticized. Brazil is only fifth in South American qualifying and badly needs a victory against Chile on Sunday in Santiago. Only the top four nations automatically qualify for the 2010 tournament in South Africa.

"We are working hard here, giving our best effort," the Inter Milan goalkeeper said. "His statements were very unfortunate. He could have said a simple word or a phrase to support us and it would have given us even more motivation to try to win. I've learned that we have to think twice before saying anything, and I don't think he did that."

Dunga also complained about the presidential criticism. "We have a lot of admiration for the president, he is a great leader". However "obviously, we would like to have his support and incentive, we would like to have him on Brazil's side even in difficult times."

Brazil, coached by Dunga, failed to win the Olympic gold medal in China last month and returned home with the bronze after losing in the semifinals to Argentina. For the second Olympics running Argentina returned with the gold medal after defeating Nigeria in Beijing.

Brazil's senior team hasn't scored a goal in its last two 2010 Cup qualifiers. It is coming off a 2-0 loss to Paraguay and a 0-0 home draw against the Argentines.

"There is a great rivalry between Brazil and Argentina," Dunga said. "I don't know if the president knows, but the Argentines haven't won a title since 1993, while Brazil twice won the Copa America, won the Confederation's Cup and the World Cup."

Brazil beat Argentina 3-0 in last year's Copa America final in Venezuela, and before the Olympic defeat it hadn't lost to the South American archrivals since 2005.

"It was a very indelicate moment for him to say what he said," added Júlio César.

The goalkeeper also said Thursday he received a lighter form of criticism from his 6-year-old son Cauet when he found out that Ronaldinho was moving to Inter rival AC Milan. "Dad, you are in trouble! Ronaldinho is going to Milan," Cauet told him.

Lula's press office said the president did not have any immediate response to Dunga's and Júlio César's comments.

The spokesperson for the Brazilian Football Confederation, CBF, Rodrigo Paiva tried to cool the escalating controversy pointing out that goalkeeper Júlio César made the remarks personally and not in representation of the national team players.

This is not the first time Lula, an avid fan of soccer is involved in controversy. In the 2006 World Cup he said that Brazilian star Ronaldo was overweight. But the striker did not take the comment in good grace.

"The President should not believe every thing that is said. Because they are also saying that President Lula drinks too much and I will end believing it could be true."

The controversy also reached Argentina where a group of blogs accepted the idea of making Lula an Argentine citizen, as long as Brazil takes President Cristina Kirchner in exchange.

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